

Between June of 2020 and April 2023 researchers at Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service interviewed parents who completed the OhioSTART program through their county children services agency. Parents were recruited through a flyer shared by their CPS caseworker to contact researchers and voluntarily participate in a short interview to answer questions about their experience in the program, the impacts on their lives and their parenting, and any challenges they experienced.

Key Findings

- The most important outcome reported by parents was achieving sobriety, which in turn led to improvements in their family dynamics, mental health, and ability to handle difficult situations without resorting to substances.
- There is a positive impact on relationships with family and friends (though many report distancing from negative influences) and improved family communication.
- OhioSTART staff assisted with securing stable, affordable housing, which helped parents reunite with their children.
- OhioSTART staff assisted with accessing needed community resources such as utilities, and diapers.
- Many parents gained stable employment after participating in OhioSTART, with one stating it was their "first time in [their] life" having a good job.

6 parents reported they were pursuing their certification to become a peer mentor or a drug counselor assistant.

- The START approach has a positive effect on parents' perceptions of Child Protective Services, recognizing their goal is to help parents recover and reunite with their children.
- Parents credit Ohio START for helping them **KEEP** custody or **REUNITE** with their children if custody was temporarily lost.

Interviewee Demographics

- 42 Interviews
- Cases from 18 Ohio counties
- Average age = 31 (range 20-45)
- 34 Females, 8 Males
- 39 White, 2 Black, 1 Hispanic & White

Impact on Parenting

- Parents overwhelmingly reported that after completing OhioSTART they prioritized their children more.
- Parents also consistently reported that they engage in more appropriate activities with their children i.e. helping with homework or going for walks.
- Parents feel far more present psychologically for their children and substance use was directly related to the sense of not being present previously.

"I wasn't a parent. I mean, I would attempt to parent when I was high, but I couldn't focus enough to be a parent. And then I would come down and all I would want to do is sleep. So obviously, I wasn't a parent. I was existing and I was in her life, but I wasn't present in her life." – START Parent

- Parents also have improved attitudes toward parenting and many note they do more activities with their child/children.

"I got a kitchen table, a brand new one. We all sit and eat dinner at dinner time, every night, as a family. No phones, no TV. We actually sit together and eat. We talk about our day. And I never did that before." - START Parent



6 parents reported the START Program saved or prolonged their life.